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DE RUEHAH #1623/01 3510353  
ZNR UUUUU ZZH  
P 170353Z DEC 09  
FM AMEMBASSY ASHGABAT  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3923  
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE  
RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE  
RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE  
RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 6015  
RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 3709  
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 3568  
RUEHIT/AMCONSUL ISTANBUL 4257  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC  
RHMCSUU/CDR USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC  
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC  
RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE 4196

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SENSITIVE  
SIPDIS

DEPT FOR SCA/CEN; PRM

E.O. 12958: N/A  
TAGS: [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PGOV](#) [TX](#)  
SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: PRM TAFT GRANT-FUNDED VOCATIONAL  
TRAINING WORKSHOPS COMPLETED

REF: A. ASHGABAT 787  
[1](#)B. ASHGABAT 1247

[1](#)1. (U) Sensitive but unclassified. Not for Internet  
distribution.

[1](#)2. (SBU) On December 11, poloff and political assistant  
attended the opening of three vocational training workshops  
funded by a Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration  
Julia Taft Refugee Fund grant, the first such grant project  
to be implemented in Turkmenistan. The workshops, for  
sewing, carpet making and metal working, are located in three  
renovated rooms of the local school in the Gokhan settlement  
in Mary province, about an hour's drive from the provincial  
capital, Mary city. Gokhan settlement is a residential area  
located on a farmer's union (formerly a Soviet kolkhoz or  
collective farm) of the same name. The refugees and former  
refugees who live in Gokhan are ethnic Turkmen who came from  
Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran. Those who came from  
Tajikistan were granted Turkmen citizenship in 2005. The  
refugees and former refugees make up about 70 percent of the  
settlement's population. They were settled on the former  
kolkhoz because there was vacant housing available in small,  
Soviet-era apartment buildings. Some have also built modest  
single-family houses. Training and employment opportunities,  
especially for young people, are scarce.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Poloff and political assistant were accompanied  
throughout the visit by Murad Atayev, the head of the Mary  
provincial branch of the Humanitarian Association of Turkmen  
of the World (Ref B) and the provincial official responsible  
for international cooperation projects. Also present was  
Sabir Agabalayev, programs manager for the NGO Keik Okara,  
which was the Embassy's partner in conducting a needs  
assessment and implementing the project. In addition, the  
school director, representatives of the farmers' union,  
district and provincial governments and numerous local  
residents were present for the opening of the workshops.

[1](#)4. (SBU) The sewing workshop was located in a well-lighted  
room that had been recently painted and provided with new  
electrical wiring. Security bars had been installed on the  
windows. The sewing machines were being used by teenage

girls who were sewing school uniforms for younger siblings. It was the first time they had used electric sewing machines.

The school has designated an instructor/supervisor for the sewing workshop. Sewing classes for students will be held during school hours, with an opportunity for residents to use the equipment for income generating work at other times. The carpet workshop consisted of two vertical steel carpet looms for use in hand-weaving carpets. The women in the workshop said they use horizontal carpet looms on the floors of their homes, but that they would teach their daughters to use the vertical looms because it would be much more comfortable. They displayed samples of their carpets, which they sell in the bazaar in Mary city. The carpet workshop would be overseen by a former refugee from Iran, a dynamic woman who had received awards for her weaving and was vocal in her support for the workshop as useful for the community. In the metalwork shop, the massive lathe machine was not yet hooked up to a power source. They had the cable to make the necessary direct connection to the power substation across the street, but there had not been enough time before the opening to install it. The farmer's union is committed to hiring a full-time supervisor for the workshop. Officials noted that the area will benefit greatly from the ability to fabricate parts and make repairs provided by the workshop.

15. (SBU) COMMENT: The visit, scheduled well in advance, provided an useful impetus for local officials to complete the premises and get the workshops up and running. Given the isolation of the settlement and the limited opportunities for both training and income generating activities, the workshops clearly meet local needs and have already been embraced by

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the population. The school setting is accessible to the community at large and also will provide a level of security for the proper maintenance and use of the equipment. In addition to helping the residents of Gokhan, the project was useful in developing working relations between the local NGO and government officials. A return visit in a few months will provide confirmation about the ongoing operation of the workshops. Post distributed a press release about the event and posted a news item and pictures on its website. END COMMENT.  
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